

✚ A:PICTURE:OF ✚  
THE:RESURRECTION



JAMES M. GRAY



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## **A Picture of the Resurrection**

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# A Picture of the Resurrection

An Exposition of the Fifteenth  
Chapter of First Corinthians

By

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## Foreword

**W**HERE the following Exposition has been given from the platform, people have spoken of it as a “ picture of the Resurrection,” which has suggested the title.



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## I

### INTRODUCTION

**A**N “honest doubter” said recently that ministers were all wrong. Instead of presenting facts and arguments to prove the Bible true, they were preaching the Bible as if it *were* true. He thought the process should be reversed.

But he was mistaken. Christian evidences are of great value in their place, but it is a question whether that place is before a man is converted to Jesus Christ or after it.

There is no use in presenting facts and arguments to dead men, and unconverted men are dead men, “dead in trespasses and sins.” What they need before evidence is life.

And the Word of God is life, and begets life. It is “living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intent of the heart” (Heb. 4:12). “Of His

own will beget He us with the Word of truth," says James, writing to the Christians of his day (1 : 18); and that is normally the way in which all men are begotten, or obtain life.

The application never was more pertinent than when we come to consider the enchanting subject of physical resurrection. Every Christian preacher fitted for his calling knows that this is as much a fact as physical creation; and he is a wise master-builder if he brings all the force of that conviction to bear upon his fellow men. He does this only when he expounds the Scripture just as it is. "The prophet that hath a dream, let him tell a dream," saith the Lord; "and he that hath My word, let him speak My word faithfully" (Jer. 23 : 28).

There were some in the young church at Corinth, led astray by false teachers, who denied the resurrection of the body. They were not questioning the immortality of the soul which even paganism taught; but, like them of Athens, they were ready to mock at the resurrection from the dead.

We may be thankful for this error because of the good that has come out of it, for, as Dean

Alford says, we have thus obtained one of the grandest and most precious portions of the apostolic writings.

To quote his words: "For record of the appearances of our Lord after His resurrection; for cogent argument binding His resurrection to ours; for assertion and implication of the great doctrine of His inclusive humanity; for revelation of holy mysteries imparted by special inspiration; for triumphant application of the phenomena and analogies of nature; no extant writing can compare with this chapter in its value to the Church; its power of convincing the mind and awakening Christian hope; and its far-seeing confutation of the cavils and scoffs of all after-ages against the doctrine of the resurrection."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "How to Study the New Testament," pp. 94. 95.



## II

### THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST

"I delivered unto you, first of all, that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures ;

"And that He was buried ; and that He rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures ;

"And that He was seen of Cephas ; then of the twelve ;

"After that, He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once ; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.

"After that He was seen of James ; then of all the apostles.

"And last of all He was seen of me also, as one born out of due time.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Now if Christ be preached that He rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead ?" (3-12).

**T**HUS Paul first proves that there *is* such a thing as resurrection from the dead. Just now he is not concerned with your resurrection or mine, but with resurrection itself as a historic fact.

It is for this reason he brings forward the resurrection of Christ. If He arose from the dead, then resurrection cannot be denied, nor can the caviller longer say, "We know nothing of the next life, for no one has ever come back to tell us about it."

Nor is it a little singular that his first witness to the resurrection of Christ should be the Holy Scriptures. Some apologists would have presented this last as a kind of appendage, if they had considered it at all. Affrighted by the charge of "reasoning in a circle," they would have marshalled every material fact before drawing on one of so spiritual and "impractical" a character. But to the inspired apostle this was of the chiefest importance.

And in so far his example confirms what was said about the relation of the Christian evidences to spiritual life. Present the living word of the Living God to the soul first, and when that soul has been quickened by it, then is he able to appreciate its confirmation in other ways.

But the mystery deepens when we consider that the Scriptures Paul speaks of are those of the Old Testament! The New Testament (the

Gospels, at least) was not then in circulation, nor had it attained the distinction of such a title.

Where does the Old Testament speak of the resurrection of Christ? How difficult for the average student, to say nothing of the casual reader of the Bible, to discover such a revelation there? And yet the second psalm testifies to His resurrection, and the sixteenth psalm, and the prophet Isaiah (53), and the prophet Hosea (6), and how many more we cannot say.

Oh, how we should like to have been with the disciples on that first day of the week, when Christ opened "their understanding, *that they might understand the Scriptures*, and said unto them, 'Thus it is written, and thus it behove Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day'" (Luke 24:45, 46).

But the resurrection of Christ having thus been proven by the Scripture revelation that it would take place, it is in order to corroborate that revelation by the testimony of historic fact, and in so doing the apostle produces no less than 514 witnesses!

These are Cephas, or Peter; the whole apostolate; five hundred brethren at once; James, and lastly, Paul himself.

One man may be deceived, or even two or three, or a score let us say, but five hundred ! This is unlikely. And especially so, when the appearances were not limited to a passing moment or even a single day, but when they covered many days, six weeks in fact, and were in the daylight as well as in the night.

It is to be remembered also that the most gracious intimacy was accorded several of these witnesses ; who were permitted to eat and drink with Jesus, to walk and talk with Him, to observe the print of the nails in His hands and in His feet, and as in the case of Thomas, to thrust their hand into the wound of the spear in His side.

And who were these witnesses ? Consider the competency of men like James the brother of our Lord, and the eleven apostles who were not only qualified by their long and close acquaintanceship with Jesus, but by their great intelligence as well. We speak of them as humble fishermen and the like, but we forget that they were able by their preaching to turn "the world upside down," the world of the proud Augustan period ; and that their writings still live as the most potent in the history

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of mankind. These were not ordinary witnesses.

And the time at which their testimony was borne is of great importance, since it was practically contemporaneous with the event. It was a hundred years after Mohammed died before any miracles were claimed for him, and about as long after the death of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits. Paganism was equally careful to affirm no wonders of its saints until a sufficient period had elapsed to render the detection of a fraud impossible. But not so in the case of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. "The greater part of the five hundred brethren are still alive," says Paul to the Corinthians; "you can easily discover them and cross-examine them as to the things they saw and heard."

And Paul is offering this challenge to a church in which there existed a party that contested the truth of which he spake. Think you not they would have improved this opportunity to ascertain the facts if they doubted them?

As answering that question, we do not read that Paul, or any of his fellow-apostles ever discontinued their preaching of the resurrec-

tion. They proclaimed it almost daily even unto the end of their earthly life. They stood accused at the bar of justice for it. They made long, hazardous and manifold journeys on its account. They mentioned it in their letters and private conversation. They defended it. They suffered for it. They died for it. Were such men as these either deceived or deceivers?

To doubt all this evidence, and much more that might be named, is to annul the whole science of history. As a modern apologist says: "Once admit that witnesses of the character and discernment of the apostles could be repeatedly, and in good faith, so grossly deceived about an event so easily determinable as the resurrection of Jesus, and any sophist will be able in the same way with ease to get rid of any fact of history that he finds convenient."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ludwig von Gerdtell, "Have We Satisfactory Evidence of the New Testament Miracles?"

### III

#### THE RESURRECTION OF THE RACE

“But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept.

“For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

“For as in Adam all die, even so, in Christ, shall all be made alive” (20-22).

**P**AUL’S conclusion in the premises must be ours, when he says: “Now *is* Christ risen from the dead.”

But what of the inference he draws? Here apply Dean Alford’s words about Christ’s “inclusive humanity,” and “the revelation of holy mysteries imparted by special inspiration.”

From history alone Paul might have known that Christ arose, but without revelation how could he have known that Christ was “the first-fruits of them that slept,” and how could he have made the peculiar application of it which he does?

By the “first-fruits” is meant the earnest or pledge that the whole resurrection harvest will



follow. There is some reason to believe that this epistle was written about the time of the passover (v. 7), while the day after the Pass-over Sabbath was that for the offering of the first-fruits (Lev. 23 : 10, 11). As the same was the day of Christ's resurrection, we perceive the appropriateness of the image.

There were indeed those who rose from the dead before Christ, as the man whose corpse touched the bones of Elisha (2 Kings 13 : 21), or those whom Christ Himself raised from the dead, and others who came out of their graves at the time of His crucifixion. But in all these cases there was a return to the grave afterwards, and hence no resurrection in the sense that they never saw death again. He was the first-fruits of them that slept and who now are alive forevermore !

But how shall we explain the words that follow ? We know that "by man came death," for this we are taught in the story of Eden and the comment upon it in Romans V. And we know that "by man came also the resurrection of the dead," for, as we have seen, through Christ this great blessing has been received.

And yet the meaning of the word "all" is

not clear. "As in Adam *all* die, even so in Christ shall *all* be made alive." Does it have the same significance in both cases? We know that all men without exception die in Adam, but do all men without exception rise in Christ?

This may be accepted without danger if we keep in mind that there are two kinds of resurrection—a resurrection of the just and of the unjust, a resurrection unto life, and a resurrection unto condemnation (Luke 14:14; John 5:29). Indeed it strengthens the Gospel position to insist that because Christ has risen from the dead, every man shall rise, both the wicked and the righteous, whether he will or not, to receive the things done in his body whether they be good or bad.

But instead of emphasizing the word "*all*," we might emphasize the word "*in*," and then the teaching would be that only those who are in Christ, *i. e.*, believing on Him, and saved by Him, are thus referred to. Of course, this would not exclude the thought just spoken of, that the wicked as well as the righteous are to rise, but only limit our attention for the moment to the latter.

What a wonderful thought then this is, and how comforting and assuring to Christian faith, that "because He lives, we shall live also" (John 14:19)! Our spiritual life now (to us who believe on Him), and our eternal life hereafter, are both secured by His life.

To accommodate the figure used in this and other of the epistles, He is the head of His body, the Church, of which we are the members, and hence His life guarantees our life. My head cannot rise from the dead without including the rising of my whole body, and in like manner, Christ's resurrection is incomplete without that of His people who are united to Him (1 Cor. 12:12, 13; Rom. 6:3-11; Eph. 3:4-7; Col. 2:9-12).

## IV

### THE ORDER OF THE RESURRECTION

“ But every man in his own order ; Christ the first-fruits ; afterwards they that are Christ’s at His coming.

“ Then cometh the end, when He shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God even the Father ” (23, 24).

**T**HE word translated “order” in verse twenty-three suggests a military figure, and might be rendered by “cohort” or “rank.”

You have some time stood by the side of a broad boulevard watching a procession pass. A battalion has gone by, and there has followed an interval or space. Then a second battalion has come into view and another interval or space ; and then a third, and so on to the end. This is the picture set before us in this verse.

The first division of the resurrection host has already appeared. It consisted of the Person of Jesus Christ who has “passed into the heav-

ens." There has been an interval of 2,000 years, and how much longer it may be no one can prophesy. But at its close the second division will appear. It will consist of them that are His, *i. e.*, who are united unto Him by faith, and it will come into view when He Himself shall "appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Heb. 9:28).

"Then cometh the end." That is, after another interval, and, as some believe, after the period covered by the millennial reign, the third and last division shall appear. It will consist of "the rest of the dead" (Rev. 20:5), *i. e.*, all, except those who will have been raised and glorified with Christ.

"The end" is not specially considered in this chapter, which confines its attention chiefly to the resurrection of the saints at the coming of Christ and the glory that shall follow.

And yet it tells us that at "the end" Christ "shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father." All through His millennial reign when His Church is reigning with Him, He will be putting "down all rule, and all authority and power," *i. e.*, all such rule, authority and power as is opposed to Him and to His

God and Father, Whom, as Mediatorial King, He represents.

The last enemy thus to be put down is death, which, as "the wages of sin" (Rom. 6:23), must exist as long as sin exists. It is only when sin is ended that what we know as death, the separation of soul and body, the dissolution of the complex nature of man into its constituent elements, shall henceforth cease to be.<sup>1</sup>

And then when sin ceases, and death ceases, when the last enemy is destroyed, when all things are put under the Son, the latter will deliver up the kingdom, the Mediatorial Kingdom over which He has thus reigned, to God, the Father; and He Himself, as the Son, will be subject unto Him, God being "all in all."

"The restoration of God's Kingdom over the moral and spiritual part of man was the object of Christ's mission on earth; for this He is called 'the door,' and 'the way,' because by Him are we brought nigh to God. Thus in the end each believer will have immediate and individual relations not only with the Man Christ Jesus, but with the Whole of the Blessed Trinity."

<sup>1</sup> Cambridge Bible.

## V

### THE NATURE OF THE RESURRECTION-BODY

"But some man will say, How are the dead raised up, and with what body do they come?

"Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die ;

"And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but a bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain ; but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him, and to every seed his own body.

\* \* \* \* \*

"So also is the resurrection of the dead.

"It is sown in corruption ; it is raised in incorruption ;

"It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory ; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.

"It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body " (35-44).

THE question put into the mouth of the objector at the beginning of this section does not refer to the possibility of the resurrection but the character of the resurrection body. The skepticism here is ex-



pressed in the thought that "this poor, suffering and corrupt flesh of ours could not harmonize with the employments and splendours of the eternal life." It could not be competent for the functions and demands of an exalted spiritual state.

"A wide-spread doctrine of the ancient philosophers was that the body is the prison of the soul, a foul enclosure, a drag, an enemy," and the thought that it should share the experiences of heaven seemed a scandal. They erred, not knowing the nature of the resurrection body.

Paul seeks to remove this ignorance by a threefold analogy from nature :

(a) "That which thou sowest is not quickened except it die." The death of the seed is absolutely necessary to the production of the plant, and indeed that death is part of the process of its own quickening.

It is the same in the death of the human body. There is a process of quickening in that death, a process of change and of growth. To use the language of another, "death is not the mere inertness of a state of dissolution, but there is in it what is analogous to the germ

principle of the seed." Whatever that is, it only "waits for the favourable environment of God's appointed time to burst forth into developed life." And in doing so it lays hold of new particles and weaves them into a new tissue and a new fabric.

(b) "That which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but a bare grain; . . . but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him." In other words the resurrection body is a different one from that which died. The bare grain, the naked corn you deposit in the earth is a tiny thing, dry and uninteresting in appearance. But it comes forth a blade, an ear, a full corn in the ear, charmingly beautiful, and satisfying you with its fruit.

So with the human body. The body that dies is not the body that shall be. Its pains and aches will not be experienced then. "The lusts which rage here shall not kindle their baleful fires there. The weariness of the flesh which so dogs our mental efforts, nothing of this shall characterize the risen body."

As Paul says, what is sown in corruption shall be raised in incorruption; what is sown

in dishonour shall be raised in honour ; what is sown in weakness shall be raised in power ; what is sown a natural body shall be raised a spiritual body. "Spiritual," as Bishop W. R. Nicholson reminds us, "not as regards its substance, for it will be matter still, but spiritual as regards its use. This present body could by no means accompany and sustain our spirits under the energy of the eternal life ; but that future body will be the easy companion of the Christian soul in his farthest and highest explorations, a companion to the soul as wings are to the bird, as light is to the heat, as fragrance is to the breeze." God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him.

(c) "And to every seed its own body," or as the Revised Version expresses it, "to each seed a body of its own." In other words, while the resurrection body is not the same as to its particles it is still the same as to continuity and identity. The matter of our present bodies is always changing, and in that sense we have not the same body of seven years ago, and yet we have the same body nevertheless, and we are conscious of it beyond a doubt.

To refer to the analogy, the seed imbedded

in the ground and the plant produced by it are not the same and yet they are the same. Without that particular seed, that particular plant would not have been, and if the seed could be imagined as possessing self-consciousness, it would declare in the plant, "This is I myself."

And so, quoting Bishop Nicholson again, "Our consciousness in the resurrection will tell us that the body we then inhabit is the one in which the deeds of our former life were done. That hand, then so powerful and so graceful in the beauty of heaven, will be the same that gave the cup of cold water here to a Christian brother. That tongue, then the very rival of Gabriel's, will be the same which here sang of Jesus, and spake a word in season to him that was weary. Your own identity, from infancy through your earthly decease, onward into the splendours of the eternal life will lie before you as an unbroken scene. You will say, 'It is I myself.'"

Thus "as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." In the present life we are like the first Adam; in the next we shall be like the second Adam. "For whom He did foreknow,

He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). "For our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of His glory" (Phil. 3:21). "Now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

## VI

### IF NOT RESURRECTION, THEN TRANSLATION

“Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.

“Behold I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

“In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (50-52).

“**T**HE kingdom of God” here does not mean that which some day will be established in the earth, and in which Israel and the Gentile nations converted to God will be the subjects; but as another says, “the kingdom in glory,” “the kingdom on the other side of death.” To “inherit” it is the same as entering into it and partaking of its glory and its endless life.

“Flesh and blood” cannot inherit it, because that is just another name for our human nature

as it is, and Paul has already taught us that a change is necessary.

Some of the early heretics made so much of this expression "flesh and blood" as to jump at the conclusion that it disposed of a material resurrection altogether. As if Paul would so flatly contradict himself almost in the same breath!

But the early fathers of the Church opposed them, and cited as an argument the words of Jesus in Luke 24:39, where He attested His own resurrection by saying to His disciples, "A spirit hath not flesh and bones as ye see me have."

Evidently "flesh and bones" and "flesh and blood" are not identical terms. Quoting the Numerical Bible, "the blood applies to the present life. It is the vehicle of change. It is that which implies the need of continual sustenance and renewal. A body which needs no renewal cannot need blood to renew it."

Was it for this reason that Jesus spake of Himself not as having "flesh and blood," but "flesh and bones"? He had poured out His blood, and left it with the earthly life that He had lived. But now He had entered on a new



sphere, retaining all that made Him truly man, but not the conditions of the old earthly life. Is this what Paul means? May we say that "flesh and blood" shall not inherit the kingdom of God in this sense of it?

But now comes the "mystery." The Scofield Bible on Matthew 13:11 defines a mystery in Scripture as "a previously hidden truth now divinely revealed, but in which a supernatural element still remains despite the revelation."

There are eleven of these mysteries in the New Testament, but perhaps the most "spectacular" of them all is this: "We shall not all sleep," *i. e.*, there is one generation of believers who shall never see death. And this same apostle, in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18, tells us who they will be. "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven, . . . and the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

We recall his words about the order of the resurrection. 'The second cohort of the resur-

rection army will consist of them "that are Christ's at His coming." But with them will be another band not of raised ones, but of changed ones. "The dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." The "we" identifies those believers who will be alive and remaining on the earth in the flesh when Jesus comes. They shall be caught up.

Paul expected to be one of these, hence the "we." "In a moment." The literal meaning is "that which is so small as to be actually indivisible." "Changed." Not entirely destroyed and created again, but receiving an addition of qualities which were not possessed before. "This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

In his second epistle to this church (5:4), Paul furnishes an interesting comment on this last statement. He says, "We that are in this tabernacle (this bodily frame) do groan, being burdened; not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life." And Murdock's Literal Translation from the Syriac Peshitto Version renders it, "We groan under its

burden ; yet ye desire, not to throw it off, but to be clothed over it, so that its mortality may be absorbed in life."

The idea is that the Christian is groaning not with the desire for death, but the glory of translation when the Lord comes. It is a picture of the saint ascending in his body of humiliation, and as he enters the clouds, being "clothed over" with his body of glory. Thus that part of him which is mortal is "swallowed up" in that which is immortal. What a blessed and glorious hope !

" O, joy ! O, delight ! should we go without  
dying,  
No sickness, no sadness, no dread and no  
crying,  
Caught up through the clouds with our  
Lord into glory,  
When Jesus receives His own ! "

## VII

### OUR GROUND OF VICTORY

“O, death, where is thy victory? O, death, where is thy sting?”

“The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.

“But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (55-57).

**T**HE apostle concluded the previous verse by saying, “Death is swallowed up in victory.” A remarkable expression this, taken from the Old Testament, “denoting the swallowing up of the all-swallower,” as Vitranga said. And now he follows it by a triumphal song, in which he seems “transported to the moment of the grand consummation.”

Death is likened by the apostle to a venomous beast armed with a deadly poison (the serpent of the garden of Eden comes into mind), and by the Holy Spirit he taunts him with his defeat.

On the morning of July 4, 1898, a boy of five was awakened by the rejoicings of his elders over the destruction of the Spanish fleet by Admiral Sampson, in Santiago harbour. He listened intently to the thrilling tale while standing in his little crib. Afterwards he was urged to dress and begin his sport with the torpedoes and firecrackers given him for Independence day, but he spurned them with the remark, "Who could set off torpedoes and firecrackers on a day like this! *This* is a victory worth while!"

And so when death is emptied of its conquests on the resurrection morning, there will be "a victory worth while," in whose contemplation the fleeting vanities of the world may well be set aside.

That the "sting of death is sin" is very easy to understand.

"Who would fardels bear,  
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,  
But that the dread of something after death,  
The undiscovered country from whose bourn  
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,  
And makes us rather bear those ills we have  
Than fly to others that we know not of?  
Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all."

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It is not so easy, however, to understand the saying that "the strength of sin is the law." Yet it evidently means that what gives sin its power is that it is the transgression of the righteous law of an all-wise, all-loving and all-holy God before Whom, in all our spiritual nakedness, we shall soon stand.

"But thanks be to God who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." *How* the victory?

One summer day the writer went to console a farmer who had been seriously stung by a bee. "Well," said the farmer, "one thing gives me satisfaction; that bee 'ill never sting another man."

"Oh," it was replied, "you killed it, did you?"

"No," said he, with some disdain. "Don't you know that a bee has only one sting, and that when he stings a man he leaves his sting in him? He may alight upon another man but he has no sting for him."

Oh, blessed and holy truth! Death alighted upon Jesus Christ, and left its sting in Him. He tasted death for every man (Heb. 2:9). "Who His own self bare our sins in His own

body on the tree " (1 Peter 2 : 24). Death may alight on us who believe on Him, but it has no fatal power.

In other words, the mortal part of us may pass through the experience of death, but our spiritual part is safe. Christ has fulfilled the demands of the law on our behalf. He has satisfied divine justice. He is our righteousness, our sanctification and our redemption. He new creates our souls. He rescues our bodies from the grave. He gives us the victory in the fullest and completest sense, for "when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we also appear with Him in glory " (Col. 3 : 4).

This is a gift. God "giveth us the victory." He gives it to us through "our Lord Jesus Christ." They who take Christ take this gift. "He that hath the Son hath life " (1 John 5 : 12).

## VIII

### OUR OBLIGATION AND OPPORTUNITY

“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord ” (Verse 58).

THE Holy Spirit is always practical in His teaching, but that is not to say that this magnificent chapter comes to a “tame conclusion ” as some would have it. It is the very opposite indeed, since the conclusion links up so vitally the daily experiences of life “with the glory that shall be revealed in us ” (Rom. 8 : 18).

“Therefore, my beloved *brethren*.” Here is a discriminating word. “Brethren ” does not mean brethren after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Brethren in Christ are in mind. The opening address of the epistle would settle that if there were nothing more. “Unto the Church of God which is at Corinth,” are the words (1 : 2). And that there may be no mistake in



classifying them it is added, "even to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called saints."

But blessed be God, the saints are not limited to Corinth, but all are included "that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours."

"Be ye steadfast." This refers to our own inner purpose to adhere to "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3), especially the faith of the resurrection. "Unmovable" speaks of that which others may try to do to us. In other words, we ourselves are neither to turn away from the faith, nor permit others to turn us away. How responsible therefore are we for the counsel and the teaching to which we voluntarily lend an ear!

"Always abounding in the work of the Lord." Here is the guarantee and evidence of our steadfastness, and also the strongest offset to them who would lead us astray. "The work of the Lord" is that which He works in us, and which we bring to pass in His strength. As Kling says, "it is the work Christ Himself undertook in obedience to the Father's commission, and which He has commanded His followers to carry forward." There are two

utterances of His that tell us what it is. The first is Luke 19:10: "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost." And the second, John 20:21: "As the Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." "Abounding." In other words, why limit our reward by limiting our service? Why not be "over and above" in what we are privileged to do? "Always." Through all time, in every season, and in every way.

And why? "Forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." Not in vain, not useless, not unprofitable, because there is such a thing as the resurrection of the dead, a resurrection which means reward to them that are in Christ if they have been found faithful in Him.

That subject of reward! None seems so little understood. As A. J. Gordon once said: "If the Romanist has exalted merit to the utter exclusion of grace, the Protestant is in danger of exalting grace to the utter exclusion of merit." Of course merit has nothing to do with our pardon and acceptance, as the same author goes on to say. As sinners standing before the mercy-seat "there is no difference for

all have sinned and come short of the glory of God"; and therefore all must be saved on the same terms, "being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." But as saints standing before the judgment-seat, there is a difference, since believers are to be judged, "that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10).

Rewards have a very important place in the scheme of redemption. In order to magnify the grace of God all men must be reduced to the same level of unworthiness, but there is no necessity to fix them there forever. Did not our Lord promise His faithful ones that they should be "recompensed at the resurrection of the just" ?<sup>1</sup>

Hence these two "looks" enjoined in Scripture, with the quotation of which we bring this exposition to a close:

"Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth" (Isa. 45:22).

"Look to yourselves,—that ye receive a full reward" (2 John 8).

<sup>1</sup> "The Two-Fold Life," p. 236.















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